CLAIMS

We claim

1. A computer-implemented method for controlling networking transactions among a plurality of users populating a networking database, said networking database populated with at least user identity information and relational information between said plurality of users, said method comprising:

receiving a request from a first user to perform a transaction;

determining a feasibility of said transaction based on at least a characteristic of said transaction, a characteristic associated with an identity of said first user, and said relational information;

when said transaction is feasible, monetizing said transaction including monetization possibilities such as variable pricing for said transaction and not charging for said transaction; and

after successful monetization of said transaction, initiating execution of said transaction.

2. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 1, wherein execution of said request requires communication with a second party.

3. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 2, wherein when said second party is not one of said plurality of users in said networking database, said transaction feasibility is defined as negative.

4. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 3, further including responding to said first user that said transaction is not feasible.

5. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 2, wherein when said second party is not one of said plurality of users in said networking database, the method further comprises attempting to add said second party into said plurality of users in said

networking database whereby when said second party is successfully added to said networking database said transaction becomes feasible.

6.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 1, wherein said second party is a second user present in said networking database, and said first and second users are members of a first virtual network defined by a defined degree of separation.

7.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 1, wherein said first and second users are members of a first virtual network defined by a user profile parameter said first and second users have in common.

8   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 6, wherein said first and second users are members of a second virtual network defined by a user profile parameter said first and second users have in common.

9.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 6, wherein monetizing said transaction includes first determining a cost of executing transaction based on one or more factors including at least said defined degree of separation.

10.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 9, wherein said transaction is free when said defined degree of separation is zero or one, and said cost to said first user of execution of said transaction is a function of at least said defined degree of separation.

11.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 10, wherein said characteristic associated with an identity of said first user is a specific subscription level, and said cost to said first user is further a function of said specific subscription level.

12.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 6, wherein said feasibility is a function of at least one characteristic of said second user.

13.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 12, wherein said at least one characteristic of said second user is defined by said second user such that said second user can define whether said transaction is feasible.

14.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 6, wherein said cost of said transaction is determined by at least one characteristic of said second user.

15.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 14, wherein said at least one characteristic of said second user is a popularity of said second user and a greater popularity tends to mean a greater cost to said first user.

16.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 13, wherein said at least one characteristic of said second user is factor defined by said second user.

17.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 6, wherein said second user shares said cost of executing said transaction.

18.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 6, wherein said second user benefits from said cost of executing said transaction.

19.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 1, wherein said monetization includes a possibility of said user being paid for a successful execution of said transaction.

20.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 19, wherein said transaction includes adding new users to said networking database.

21. A computer-implemented method for controlling and monetizing transactions between users of a computer network, the method comprising:

receiving a request from a first user to initiate a transaction that is dependent upon a second user;

determining a relational connection between said first user and said second user; and

determining a cost of executing said requested transaction, said execution cost being a function of said relational connection.

22. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 21, wherein:

the requested transaction is transmission of an email message from said first user to said second user;

the cost of transmitting said email message from said first user to said second user is free when said first user and said second user have a one degree of separation relational connection; and

the cost of transmitting said email message from said first user to said second user increases as a function of a degree of separation of said relational connection;

23. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 22, wherein said increasing function has a maximum cost.

24. A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 21, further comprising initiating execution of the requested transaction if the cost of execution is met.

25. A computer-implemented method for controlling transactions among a plurality of parties, said computer-implemented method comprising:

populating a database with a plurality of users, said database storing at least user identity information and relational information between said plurality of users:

organizing one or more virtual networks from said plurality of users;

defining a set of transaction rules for determining how to implement transactions among said plurality of parties, said set of transaction rules including rules which are decided based upon data represented in said one or more virtual networks;

receiving a request from a first party to execute a transaction with a second party; and

processing said transaction request in a manner consistent with said set of transaction rules.

26. A computer implemented method as recited in claim 25, wherein said act of populating a database includes:

for said plurality of users, associating with each specific user a set of friends, wherein a friend is a one of said plurality of users that is connected to said specific user by one degree of separation.

27. A computer implemented method as recited in claim 26, wherein said associating with each specific user a set of friends includes:

receiving a request from said specific user to add a specific party to said set of friends;

determining whether said specific party is found in said plurality of users;

adding said specific party to said set of friends based upon at least said specific party being found in said plurality of users and said specific party granting permission; and

rejecting said request to add said specific party to said set of friends.

28. A computer implemented method as recited in claim 27, wherein said step of populating said database further includes monetizing the creation of said set of friends.

29. A computer implemented method as recited in claim 28, wherein said monetizing during populating includes granting said specific user a credit for each member added to said set of friends.

30.   A computer implemented method as recited in claim 25, wherein:

when said specific party is not found in said plurality of users, attempting to add said specific party to said set of users; and

when said specific party is found in said plurality of users, making permission of said specific party a necessary condition of adding said specific party to said set of friends.

31.   A computer implemented method as recited in claim 25, wherein when said request is not enabled, denying said request absolutely.

32.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 25, wherein when said request is not enabled, and said first party is a member of said plurality of users, inviting said second party to join a virtual network of which said first party is a member.

33.   A computer-implemented method for controlling transactions among a plurality of parties, said computer-implemented method comprising:

populating a database with a plurality of users, said database storing at least user identity information, relational information between said plurality of users, and profile data for said plurality of users:

organizing one or more virtual networks from said plurality of users;

receiving a request from a first party to search said profile data; and

performing said search when said first party is a member of said database and said profile data has not been made private.

34.   A computer implemented method as recited in claim 33, further comprising:

performing said search only on profile data made public.

35.   A computer-implemented method for controlling email transactions among a plurality of users, said computer implemented method comprising:

forming at least one virtual network from a plurality of users, the at least one virtual network being formed of member users, said member users consisting of all of said plurality of users that have a common predefined characteristic;

receiving from a specific party an email communication intended for delivery to a specific member user;

determining whether said specific party is a member of said virtual network; and

prohibiting delivery of said email communication when said specific party is not a member of said virtual network.

36.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 35, wherein said common predefined characteristic is a relational connection.

37.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 35, wherein said common predefined characteristic is a user profile characteristic.

38.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 35 further comprising:

storing a prohibited email without forwarding said prohibiting email to said specific user.

39.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 38 further comprising:

making said email accesible to said specific user at the discretion of said specific user.

40.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 39 further comprising:

notifying said specific user of receipt of said prohibited email communication.

41.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 35 further comprising:

notifying said specific party of a delivery failure regarding said email communication.

42.   A computer-implemented method as recited in claim 35 further comprising:

delivering said email communication when said specific party is a member of said virtual network; and

monetizing delivery of said email communication.

43.   A computer database suitable for enabling transactions between a plurality of parties including a plurality of users, said computer database comprising:

unique identity information for each of said plurality of users;

relational information associated with each of said plurality of users, said relational information useful for determining whether any two users have a connection enabling at least one type of transaction between said two users, and said relational information useful for determining a degree of separation between said two users when said two users have said connection; and

virtual network information associated with each of said plurality of users, virtual network information including an identity of a virtual network of which each specific user is a member, members of each virtual network consisting of all users having a connection enabling a transaction.

44.   A computer system suitable for operating as a server computer, said computer system comprising:

transient memory such as random access memory (RAM);

persistent memory such as a hard disk;

a central processing unit (CPU);

a networking device;

a databus coupling said transient memory, said persistent memory, said CPU, and said networking device;

a networking database stored on said computer system, said networking database populated with a plurality of users and at least data representing relational connections between said plurality of users;

a networking database process instantiated on said computer system, said process operable to receive transaction requests from said users, and monetize and execute said transaction requests based upon said data representing relational connections between said plurality of users.

45.   A computer readable medium storing executable instructions for controlling networking transactions among a plurality of users populating a networking database, said networking database populated with at least user identity information and relational information between said plurality of users, said executable instructions comprising:

receiving a request from a first user to perform a transaction;

determining a feasibility of said transaction based on at least a characteristic of said transaction, a characteristic associated with an identity of said first user, and said relational information;

when said transaction is feasible, monetizing said transaction including monetization possibilities such as variable pricing for said transaction and not charging for said transaction; and

after successful monetization of said transaction, initiating execution of said transaction.